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ABSTRACT

This brochure describes a model for a capstone cooperative education component for occupational programs in the Eastern Montgomery County (Pennsylvania) shared-time area vocational-technical school. The particular program model is built upon the traditionally accepted strengths and concepts of cooperative education, but it applies them with a focus toward one of the school's organizational principles. This principle is found in the premise of this program model, which states that occupational teachers, acting in the joint capacity of capstone co-op coordinators and occupational instructors provide the most efficient delivery of a capstone cooperative vocational education program within the context of a competency-based vocational education curriculum. Advantages of involving the occupational instructor as co-op coordinator are listed. Co-op duties of the coordinator in these program areas are detailed: select students, select worksites, match students with the appropriate training station, develop the training agreement, and monitor the program. Some implications for initiating a capstone cooperative education program using this model are also discussed. They include program oversight, staff preparation, and compensation. (YLB)

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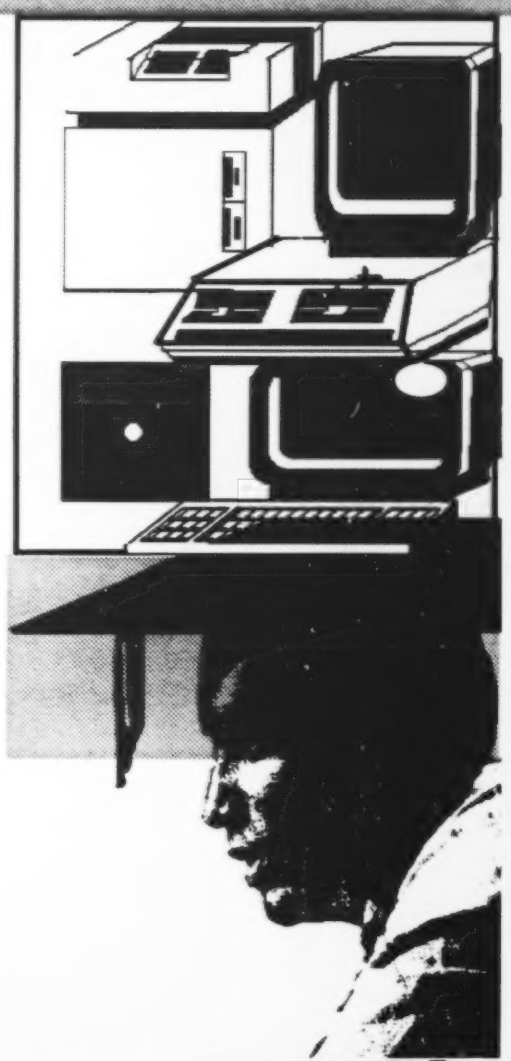
Cooperative Vocational Education

Eastern Montgomery County Area Vocational Technical School
Willow Grove, PA



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Introduction:

Eastern Montgomery County is a half-day, shared time area vocational technical school located in the Philadelphia suburbs. The school operates a capstone cooperative education component for each of its 15 occupational programs. The model described in this brochure is one which has built upon the traditionally-accepted strengths and concepts of cooperative education; it does, however, apply them with a focus toward one of the school's organizational principles. This principle states that the occupational instructor is the most knowledgeable individual in his/her area and maintains primary responsibility for all aspects of the students' education and well-being.

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Capstone Cooperative Vocational Education at Eastern PROGRAM MODEL

PREMISE

Occupational teachers, acting in the joint capacity of capstone co-op coordinators and occupational instructors for students in their programs provide the most efficient delivery of a capstone cooperative vocational education program within the context of a competency-based vocational education curriculum.

ADVANTAGES OF INVOLVING THE OCCUPATIONAL INSTRUCTOR AS CO-OP COORDINATOR

The Coordinator is familiar with each student's strengths and interests and therefore can provide the most appropriate cooperative training opportunity and job placement.

The Coordinator has current, in-depth knowledge and experience in her/his specific trade. This background can ensure the development of a transitional training opportunity that stresses specific occupational skills and knowledge which build upon the educational experiences that lead to job success.

Capstone Cooperative Vocational Education PROGRAM MODEL, Cont.

The Coordinator can deliver immediate instructional responses related to the occupational tasks which the student is about to experience or for which there is a job-indicated need. The Coordinator, using this model, can arrange for related instruction at an appropriate time to meet student needs.

The Coordinator has the opportunity to use the capstone experience to fulfill her/his responsibilities for helping the student to obtain a successful, relevant occupational placement.

The Coordinator maintains, through industry visits, more frequent and in-depth contacts with the business and industrial community. These regular contacts ensure greater currency in her/his occupational curriculum and program.

The capstone educational experience is a normal extension of the student's occupational program. A continuation of the relationship with the occupational instructor provides the greatest opportunity for the student to gain both performance and affective skills. The transition from school to work is enhanced.

The Coordinator can maintain customized programs of work experience combined with additional school/ laboratory competency-based instruction.

The Coordinator, working within this model, can develop specialized programs to meet the individual needs of handicapped and disadvantaged students.

Since students remain enrolled in their occupational program and receive weekly related instruction from their occupational teacher, regular attendance in the occupational program ensures a consistent teacher/pupil ratio throughout the school year.

The job placement responsibility for graduates remains the responsibility of the occupational instructor and is complemented by the co-op program.

Co-op Duties of the Coordinator

STUDENT SELECTION

The Coordinator determines eligibility of students for Co-op based upon the following criteria:

- Student has completed required core competencies in the occupational program or completed a performance contract to assure their completion.
- Student has completed the recommended number of instructional hours.
- Student is passing all subjects and has secured permission for Co-op placement from the sending school principal.
- Student has demonstrated appropriate attitudes toward school and work.
- Student has maintained an occupational program grade of "C" or better.
- Student is able to provide for transportation in a responsible manner.
- Student has obtained any necessary working papers.
- Parents have given their permission for co-op placement.

WORKSITE SELECTION

The Coordinator actively seeks and evaluates potential Co-op placement sites, with a view toward developing a bank of Co-op employers, as well as graduate placement opportunities, based on the following criteria:

- The employer can and will provide a safe and appropriate workstation.
- The employer will provide the student with progressive and challenging work activities.
- The employer will assign skilled workers to provide training, guidance, and supervision to the student worker.
- The employer agrees to pay the student an appropriate and legal wage and agrees to grant increases commensurate with the learner's progress.
- The employer will provide appropriate insurance for the student.
- The employer will participate in the overall evaluation of the student's progress.
- The employer will furnish a rating of the student each week and inform the school of any problems immediately.
- The employer will assist in the development of a training agreement.

MATCH THE STUDENT WITH THE APPROPRIATE TRAINING STATION

The Coordinator seeks and selects the best match of employer training station and student employee based on the student's proficiency level, instructional needs and occupational objective. This student centered approach ensures that student needs are paramount to job placement.

DEVELOP THE TRAINING AGREEMENT

The Coordinator works with the student, parents, and employer to develop a training agreement to meet the individual needs of the student. The agreement will include:

- experiences unavailable to the student in the vocational laboratory, but which are desirable for occupational competence.
- repetition and practice for retention, performance, improvement,and mastery of previously-experienced tasks.
- planned coordination of effort between school and employer to assure that the student masters all essential competencies for entry-level placement in a full-time position.
- performance and evaluation of skills essential for the transition from school to full-time employment.

MONITOR THE PROGRAM

The Coordinator monitors the program in its totality and recommends adjustments to the Co-op Committee. The Coordinator may serve as a member of the Co-op committee to consider revisions in regulations, as well as exceptions to the guidelines.

- The Coordinator documents and submits requests for exemptions from placement requirements to the Co-op committtee. She/he defends these submissions before the committtee.
- The Coordinator monitors and assures that the student progresses and ultimately completes her/his competency-based program.
- The Coordinator assures that the student meets reporting and classroom obligations.
- The Coordinator provides related instruction and remedial occupational instruction as needed to assist the student in meeting career goals.
- The Coordinator works with the student and employer to update the training agreement as needed.

Implications for Initiating A Capstone Cooperative Education Program Using the Eastern Model

PROGRAM OVERSIGHT

Co-op Committee

A committee consisting of a representative group of coordinators and a supervisor meets regularly to advise the administration on the degree to which the program is meeting its objectives. In addition, the committee reviews all requests for exceptions to program policies. For example, an instructor may request that a student who has not completed the required number of hours of in-school instruction but whose occupational objective requires mastery of competencies which are only available in a work setting, be permitted to participate in the co-op program.

Administrative Coordination

Part-time administrative coordination is necessary for the verification of compliance with established policies, handling of incoming requests for inclusion in the student "job bank," and to coordinate necessary centralized recordkeeping.

STAFF PREPARATION

University Affiliation

The school has developed an informal affiliation with Temple University. The University assists with the fulfillment of certification requirements and with in-service education for both new and experienced instructors.

Teacher Certification

Temple University offers those courses required for an instructor to become state certified as a coordinator. Through our affiliation, Temple offers these courses at the school at the end of the secondary school day.

Staff Development

Continuing in-service education for faculty and administration is necessary to stay abreast of current standards and regulatory changes,as well as to ensure consistency of sound instructional practices.

COMPENSATION

Coordinators conduct site visits on their own time--in our case either between sessions or after school. They are paid on a per-visit basis with standard reimbursement for travel expenses.